



Reason and Passion in Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*

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Abstract— This paper discusses the effect of passion when deciding the important life matters and judging others through emotional desire instead of reason. First, it demonstrates a short background of Jacobean drama and tragedy as a prominent dramatic genre of that time. The purpose of this study is to examine and analyzes characters' behaviour that leads to their own destruction. The methods that are employed in this study are the crucial notions of French psychoanalyst-feminist Julia Kristeva and her study of human behavior. Through play's textual analysis, the study has reached certain findings regarding the presentations of complex characters in Middleton's play, especially the main female characters. Finally, this study's conclusions elaborate the Kristeva's notions concerning certain behaviour that women characters perform in the play that show the motives behind their actions, whether driven by reason or passion. It is worth mentioning that Kristeva's critical notions related to desire and passion are used as the main tools of analysis to clarify the actions of one of the main female characters in the play, Beatrice, which result from her passionate personality. The way Beatrice makes use of her body to achieve certain desires or even used as a means of seduction is analyzed through Kristeva's scope of studying feminine body.



Keywords— Desire, Love, Lust, Passion, Reason.

I. INTRODUCTION

Middleton's play exemplifies complicated depictions of women as this paper explores how reason and passion affect the judgements of the characters, particularly the female protagonist. In most of his works, there are female characters of various types who are in a range of states and roles, including pure and corrupt, powerful and weak, intelligent and ludicrous. Because of his plays' accurate depictions of female sexuality, he is occasionally accused of being sexist. The fact that many of Middleton's female characters indulge in transgressive sexuality, whether through adultery, incest, or other premarital sex encounters, is regarded as one of the key traits that unites them all. Additionally, women actively exploit and identify with sexual desire and experience in his works. They take charge of their sexuality and use it to further their own objectives. Middleton imagines a society

where women band together to help one another, but it is by no means a feminism paradise. In his universe, women frequently use sex for self-serving ends and, on occasion, even to hurt one another. He demonstrates the terrifying power that comes with sexual liberation and ardor. In a strict patriarchal culture, he also depicts the danger and anarchy that come with female sexual transgression.

The Changeling (1622) was originally performed in 1622, during the Jacobean era, at London's Phoenix Theatre. In 1652 or 1653, the play's initial printing was done in London. It is a sinister tale of adultery, murder, and lust with a lighthearted subplot in a mental institution. According to Greve and Milne, *The Changeling* is counted to be "Middleton's premium tragedy. Its title comes from the fact that various characters go through transformations that render them unlike what they had been or looked like in the past to be -such is the power of love and lust" (2007:

80). The changeability of love and its effect on female characters will be discussed as the course of the play totally relies on character's inner personality in making critical decisions of life.

T.S. Eliot (1950: 141) comments on the cultural significance of Middleton, stating that when reading *The Changeling*, we "realize that we are looking on at a dispassionate exposure of fundamental passions of any moment and anywhere." Based on Eliot's opinion, this paper focuses on a certain desire that seems uncontrollable and has disastrous results. This desire is more often related to passion that leads to lust. The negative powers of passion and desire are analyzed through the perspective of French feminist-psychoanalyst notions of Julia Kristeva. Without considering the repercussions, the characters' passion may result in self-destruction. That's why, the definition of passion utilized in this paper has more to do with feelings than with mercy.

Bromham (1986: 2) refers to the mood of Jacobean drama as "a mood of pessimism, skepticism, disillusion and uncertainty, arising from a powerful awareness of time, change and human mortality." The Encyclopaedia of Britannica refers to Jacobean literature, especially drama, as "often darkly questioning." Other Jacobean dramatic writers became anxious with the problem of evil; the plays of John Webster, John Marston, Thomas Middleton, and George Chapman prompt all the terror of tragedy. Moreover, Cuddon describes late Elizabethan and Jacobean plays as "notably obsessed both with horrific crime and with aspects of criminal psychology" (2013: 168). He adds that Middleton and Rowley in *The Changeling* (1622) follows Senecan tragedy in examining the function of mental illness in society and he labels the play as a "Revenge Tragedy" (*ibid.*: 645). Since the play mimicked the features of the Senecan tragedy, the majority of the murdering and sexual acts were carried out offstage when it was initially staged. The tones and moods of Thomas Middleton's plays range from Elizabethan to Jacobean in which Vojtiskova (2022: 150) states that it is a "literary text with revolutionary potential, according to Kristeva." Jacobean tragedies, however, have a darker tone and a more introspective spirit. From this point, it is worth saying that this study tackles with the dark side of some characters, especially the main female character, Beatrice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is worth mentioning that an article by Jennifer Panek entitled "Shame and Pleasure in *The Changeling*" (2015) in which the researcher states that the play is infused with shame. The shame of its protagonist, Beatrice, that is regarded as sexual shame after her

dreadful deed. Another paper conducted by Andrew Scott under the title "Vision and Madness in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*" (1999), in which the researcher claims that is a revenge tragedy of sexual lust and violent obsession. Middleton and Rowley use the metaphors of sight, culled and adapted from the Petrarchan tradition, as a means of expressing evil, danger, and deceit, particularly when the viewing subject is female. Furthermore, Budekhin has written an article named "*The Changeling* by T. Middleton and W. Rowley as a tragedy of sin" (2019) in which he devotes his article to the consideration of the motif of 'lapse from virtue' based on the example of the heroine of the Renaissance revenge tragedy. The article identifies the key scenes of the tragedy, helping to understand the multidimensionality and allusiveness of the heroine. Lastly, an M.A. thesis written by Amy Stahl entitled "Blasting Binaries and Humanizing Humans: Thomas Middleton's Feminism" (2007) in which the researcher demonstrates the paper how Middleton breaks away from the school of thought in which Shakespeare operates and provides his audience with a more complex, more inclusive, and more admirable depiction of life.

On the other side, this study differs from the aforementioned studies in which it deals with the inner passion of the play's protagonist, Beatrice – Joanna, through the scope of French feminist- psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. It is worth stating that none of the previous studies explain or cover the notions of French feminist-psychoanalyst approach. Thus, this study is different from previous studies that creates an original and novel work that is related to the inner motives of the protagonist in the play.

The main purpose of the current study is to analyze, through French feminist-psychoanalyst approach of feminine body, the actions conducted by the protagonist that leads to her own fatal death. The way the protagonist uses her body to reach her goals out of passion, instead of employing logic and reason. Nevertheless, Kristeva's notions of feminine body are applied on the certain texts of the protagonist, Beatrice, in the play to show the consequences of certain decisions. All in all, the current study tends to make a comparison and contrast between some characters to come up with the inner motives of these characters when dealing with reason and passion in their fatal life decisions through French feminist scope.

III. METHODOLOGY

The aims of this study are achieved through the use of certain theories. The main method which is used to analyze the play is by applying the main French feminist-

psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva¹ concerning feminine body. Beatrice's exhibition of her body to reach or fulfill certain desires is the prominent perspective that the current study pays its attention to. The feelings that each character has and results in their dreadful deeds in the course of the play justifies their actions, driven by certain emotions of love, lust, and desire, especially the protagonist of the play, Beatrice. The way the characters use their brains and hearts in deciding actions makes it worthy to be analyzed through the textual analysis approach in the play. The attention of the current study will be restricted to the main French feminist-psychoanalytic notions of Julia Kristeva. The analysis used is semiotic analysis, where through this analysis, it can be seen the meaning contained in the text of the play that convey their cultural behaviour. So, the main code that the semiotic analysis will be based on is the cultural code since it reflects characters' understanding of their nature around them. Certain speeches by the major characters in the play will be analyzed through the feminist-psychoanalytic notions that were raised by Kristeva. Literature sources are obtained from books, journals, magazines, research results, and other suitable sources (internet, newspapers, and others). Finally, all data will be analyzed under the research theories of the main French feminist-psychoanalytic notions of Julia Kristeva.

IV. RESULTS

The Renaissance in England is best described as an era that was neither medieval nor modern, but in which decaying and rising contemporary world views coexisted. The belief in an ultimate moral order and a Christian Cosmography persisted until at least the middle of the eighteenth century. The great tragedies produced during the English Renaissance were at least partly the product of the conflict that existed between two divergent world views. On the one hand, Renaissance heroes possessed a tremendous stock of individual energy, making them heroic if not necessarily virtuous individuals. Sexual desire is the manifestation of energy in Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*. De Flores's passion for her is actually the same as what Beatrice refers to as her 'love' for Alsemero. As a result, they both believe that murder is a little price to pay for satisfying their desires. The major action of the play is dominated by Beatrice and De Flores, who, despite their moral resentment, captivate the audience. The crimes they commit appear to outweigh any daily virtue. But

Beatrice needs to fall since, by killing her fiancé, she broke all ties to the appropriate moral hierarchy, in this instance the familial unit. Her wicked deeds one after the other until, at last, her faults lead to her exposure. Following her and De Flores' destruction, the family unit is rebuilt and order is restored, all due to passions and desires that were seen uncontrollable in their perspectives.

V. DISCUSSION

One needs to use caution when reading literature, especially works of art with exquisite writing. It is far too simple to voluntarily suspend disbelief and immerse oneself imaginatively in the universe the author has created. Reading literature does require creativity. However, willful suspension of disbelief like this has a risk. It is easy to overlook that the truth or untruth of the text's premises rely on a higher source when we accept them at face value, especially the moral or ethical principles, as opposed to trusting in the author's chosen characters and scenario. As Carroll states in her article "that literature, by preserving and transmitting through the written word the love stories of old, may lead us into sin" (2020: 17).

The ability to discriminate between good and evil and between truth and untruth is known as reason. It allows the owner to draw conclusions from propositions or facts. The cause-and-effect chain will be taken into account when the reason is used. Any choice shouldn't be made hastily, and the individual should rely more on reason than on desire since the results or repercussions of passion may be devastating, as McAfee states that the French psychoanalytic-feminist Julia Kristeva explains the dichotomy of two poles of personality:

"In the history of Western thought, these dichotomies are usually taken to be extreme opposites: either one is a savage brute or a civilized human being; either one is acting out of lust or using one's head; either one is driven by emotion or steered by reason." (2003: 16-17)

On the other hand, passion is defined by Philippe as "a strong inclination or desire toward a self-defining activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important (high valuation), and in which one invests time and energy" (2009: 4). He further explains the term as "an activity which controls the person" (ibid.). So, it makes sense that, if not handled wisely, desire is viewed as a potent factor in deciding a man's fate.

Reason and passion are pushed in opposite directions in *The Changeling*, and therefore emotion rather than logic governs the characters. The passion becomes

¹ Julia Kristeva (1941 -) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, and, most recently, novelist, who has lived in France since the mid-1960s.

character's sexual desire and lust as Greve and Milne point that it is all about "the power of love and lust" (2007: 80). Because of this, reason has no place, and characters are unable to employ reason to make decisions and leads to "sexual difference, that is according to Kristeva is an abyss defined by the different ways men and women have relations with the Law (political/religious)." (Emam, 2018: 15). In contrast to what their thoughts are telling them, they are primarily lured by what their eyes perceive. Since the play's major protagonists meet fatal fates solely because they are more motivated by passion than by reason, it might be said that the play is emotionally aggressive. Sexual desire, which causes death-related events and frequently involves female characters suffering disproportionately, is the root of this tragedy. During Middleton's lifetime, The Jacobean court would be the perfect candidate for a sexual revolution if anybody were to be going through one. Stone says that under the reign of James I, sexual morality in the court of England "reached its nadir and became a public scandal" (1977: 504).

In this tragedy, the irony is apparent when characters mistake sexual desires with reasonable judgment. Beatrice as a woman is highly driven by passion in which she is regarded as "the incarnation of the split of the complete subject, a passion" (Kristeva, 1986: 297). When she falls in love with Alsemero, she congratulates herself on her judgment, reasonably forgetting that she is engaged to Alonzo:

Me thinks I love now with the eyes of judgment,
And see the way to merit, clearly see it.
A true deserver like a diamond sparkles:
In darkness you may see him that's in absence
Which is the greatest darkness falls on love,
Yet is he best discerned then
With intellectual eyesight (Taylor and Lavagnino,
2010, II. I: 1646).²

By the end of this speech, Beatrice, driven by passion, talks to Alsemero about how they could "remove the cause" (II: 1648) by referring to Alonzo. Alsemero announces that he will encounter Alonzo which seems a solution as an outcome of reason, but Beatrice rejects his idea as Kim implies that "honor of a female being defined almost exclusively by her sexual behavior" (2021: 347). For Alsemero, the vision of the beautiful Beatrice-Joanna at her devotions realizes "his desire for a partner who symbolizes chastity, fidelity, and piety." (1999: 167). This

makes Beatrice turn away from the moral ethics that she was raised on as Kristeva praises women of having great role in constituting the pillars of community "in order to have an ethics of life, women must be involved" (Oliver, 1993: 110). Hence, her passion overcomes reason and she is emotionally afraid she would lose Alsemero that makes her to be a destructive part in the community. She seeks a solution in which Alsemero would not be harmed. Thus, she passionately thinks, in herself, she can convince De Flores to kill Alonzo. In this situation, it can be recalled why Plato (428-348 BC) rejected passion in his Republic (c. 380 BC)³ as Habib (2011:13) states that Plato in his Republic divides the 'soul' into three parts. He addresses passion and desire as the 'appetite soul' in which it is the part of each of us that desires and feels a great deal of stuff. So, according to Plato, some of desires have to be resisted must develop at least a modicum of self-control. In this context, Beatrice defies Kristeva's notion of feminine body when she uses it as means to achieve her sordid goal that is killing Alonzo "the feminine body is the purest state of nature, free from any other (man or language)" (Kristeva, 1982: 166).

In the same act, De Flores enters after Alsemero leaves and he meets Beatrice. He suggests to himself that since Beatrice has two lovers, why not me to be the third one. When Beatrice and De Flores start talking, there is a complete absence of reason and the atmosphere is full of negative passion. Beatrice decides to flirt with De Flores. He, highly driven by Beatrice's passion, readily agrees to commit the murder and thinks he would sleep with her afterwards. He is best described as the "object subject of desire" (Kristeva, 1986: 248). De Flores and Beatrice best illustrate the nature and dominance of sexual desire, which permeates many of the other characters, rather than reason. Beatrice is driven by her sexual passion which is 'id' so as De Flores. According to Freud, the 'id' is "the storage of sexual and uncontrollable desires" (Habib, 2011: 238). The two characters exclude reason in this context which is according to Kristeva (1984: 218) is "prohibition" of some dangerous personal desires. Since Beatrice and De Flores are unable to control their sexualities, they are seen as totally naturalistic and predators. Also, at the end of the play, Alsemero discusses the strength and intricacy of passion itself in addition to his wife and her lover (O cunning devils! / How should blind men know you from fair-faced saints?)(V.III: 1675-76). So, it is understood

² Throughout this paper, this book will be used as a reference of *The Changeling*. The book includes all the literary works of Thomas Middleton and it includes 2017 pages. The book will be used for quotations, with mentioning the number(s) of the act(s), scene(s) and page(s) in the in-text citation.

³ Plato's Republic (c. 380 BC), which encapsulates the ideal condition, motivated many humanist philosophers. Through a discussion that Socrates leads, The Republic examines several aspects of the ideal state. In the Republic, logic and reason are seen superior to passion and desire (Milne, 2009: 388).

how powerful passion and lust are if not treated reasonably and carefully.

In the play, De Flores, as a male character, illuminates what Middleton understood about a personality ruled by its sexual desires. De Flores himself is unable to comprehend the pressure he feels when he meets Beatrice since all he receives in compensation is the sharp edge of her tongue. It is clear from his subsequent remarks that desire is unreasonable and contradicts reason:

Why, am not I an ass to devise ways
Thus to be rail'd at? I must see her still!
I shall have a mad qualm within this Hour again,
I know't, and like a common Garden-bull,
I do but take breath to be lugg'd again.
What this may bode I know not (II.I: 1647)

By acting similarly to her mistress, Diaphanta also illustrates how a person might fall from favour at any time. She is hired by Beatrice for a thousand ducats to become Alsemero's virgin, in order that he would think he has married a pure and virgin lady. Diaphanta, who promises to leave Alsemero's bed at midnight, but stays until a fire cry awakens the home. Diaphanta confesses the pleasure, the dishonest experience gave her, turned her head away (Pardon frailty, madam:/ In troth I was so well, I ev'n forgot myself.) (V.I: 1671). Beatrice's way of convincing Diaphanta is the desire that "designates the process of the subject's advent in the signifier through and beyond needs or drives" (Kristeva, 1984: 130). At the end of this act, it is De Flores's idea to set the castle on fire and Beatrice agrees. In an action that is free of reason and logic, she even agrees to De Flores's suggestion to kill Diaphanta. Beatrice and De Flores act like predators, as in a natural forest, in killing every suspect. This can be drawn on Darwinian notion of "the struggle for survival" or "survival for the fittest." (Habib, 2011: 170). The personality driven by De Flores is acted out of lust as an animal that is the 'id'. It's significant to highlight that the decision to murder Alonzo is Beatrice's only free choice, the choice of her own destiny. This point of view is reinforced by the words of Tamarchenko (2008) "at the moment of choice, the character shows a maximum of free initiative; but as soon as the choice is made, the further course of events becomes inevitable, subject to extra-personal machinations" (As cited in Budekhin, 2019: 702).

The impulses that drive Beatrice and De Flores are evident, but Beatrice thinks that what she loves about Alsemero is his perspective on the world and that her decisions are driven by her judgment as Kristeva states that she is "caught in the trap of love" (2011: 62). This is apparently the dreadful side of personal desires as Kristeva

states that "it is a desire...a blinding field of colour and light" (1986: 232). This can be seen as confusing in her complaints about Alonzo's boldness. Alsemero gently kisses her and courtly compliments her. She believes that he is the loving partner she deserves and longs for. She is aware of her place in the social hierarchy, but she is not aware of the responsibilities that come with it as Eliot describes Middleton's style of writing as "a strain of realism underneath" (Simmons, 1980: 135). She is ready to do anything since she believes that Alsemero would make a better spouse than Alonzo. The reader can sense that she is leading herself to a terrible dead-end by depending on male character "at the heart of this phallic assumption, she is nevertheless at a disadvantage" (Kristeva, 2011: 119) which will consequently be called "the —dead/less, depending on a Kristevan approach." (Khalifeh, 2010: 11). Just to gain her goals, she rejects her duties, the obligations that link people's interactions with one another and with society at large. As a result, she continues to serve as the foundation for any arranged structure on earth. In this scene where Beatrice thinks that by money she could gain and reach happiness, she even rejects the social structure and uses money to cover her loss of virginity.

On the other hand, Lollio, Antonio and Franciscus are driven by their passion 'id'. The atmosphere that they live in is full of sexual passion and lust toward Isabella. She seems the only one who uses reason and not driven by her passion. So, the reason and logic are totally not used by the three gentlemen to make themselves aware of the fact that she is married. Alibius, Isabella's husband, leaves her for Lollio to take care of her or even to lock her up. She is seen as an attractive object and thus explains that "the thoughts and psychology of the digression affected Middleton and appeared in his play" (Stafford, 2016: 208). For example, Antonio, in a hard pursuit of Isabella's body, declares:

Shall I alone
Walk through the orchard of the Hesperides,⁴
And cowardly not dare to pull an apple?
(III.III:1655).

Antonio, along with Franciscus, disguises themselves as madmen to get closer to Isabella. They stand for an odd fusion of De Flores and Alsemero since they speak to Isabella with all the ardent conceits of lovers. Simultaneously, Isabella is the target of their seduction, and their supposed love is really lust as Malcolmson implies that *the Changeling* "examines hierarchal relations in terms of male control over women" (1990: 320). This

⁴ Hesperides: three mythological nymphs whose orchard contained golden apples.

can be related to the theory of 'objectification' which, according to Papadaki (2018), is "a notion central to feminist theory. It can be roughly defined as the seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object." Likewise, Kristeva refers to men who want to experience more women bodies and treat them as objects "like multiplying of objects of desire" (1986: 183). Papadaki adds that Immanuel Kant thought of sexuality as extremely problematic when exercised outside the context of monogamous marriage and he writes in the *Lectures on Ethics* (1997: 163):

"Sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite; as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone."

The standing of women as a whole is diminished to that of simple instruments used by males. Unfortunately, Beatrice, driven by passion, helps to achieve this in favor of the villain character in the play "the immoral nature, suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality" (Simmons, 1980: 135). In contrast, Isabella tries her best to keep her morality safe from the animalistic people around her as a quality which defines her moral existence as Kristeva refers to a woman's fight for her identity as "the only means of self-preservation in the struggle to safeguard an identity" (1986: 201). She is considered the one and only female character that knows the power of sexual love "while the love relationship has its promises, it also has its dangers" (McAfee, 2003: 42). She is able to make a balance between the two opposite poles of personality that makes her perfectly wise in dealing with the power of love, whether positive or negative. The type of "feminine power must have been experienced as denied power" (Kristeva, 1986: 170). She seems really powerful when controlling her desires, but appears weak in the weak of male characters in the play. That's why she is the only winner in this tragedy. To further explain, Sheikh 'Abd al-Hamid Kishk states:

"The fact that 'love of worldly appetites is painted in glowing colours' means that 'people actually approve of loving them and see nothing ugly or any fault in doing that. They almost never abandon them. It is a very strong kind of love and people in its grip rarely see its ugliness or harmfulness even though it is both ugly and harmful. So they do not want to leave it even though it is harmful for them. It is possible to love something even though you know it is evil and not good, harmful and not beneficial. You

desire it in spite of that; like some people who smoke even though it causes them harm. If love of a thing is not painted in glowing colours, you always have the possibility of leaving it but if it is, it is almost impossible to give it up." (2012: 10)

So, the male character in this play is infatuated with the appearance of the female protagonist. Overwhelmed with emotions, Alsemero is totally lost with lust, as John Piper claims that "the male eye is like a magnet in its attraction to excessive female skin, or tantalizing gaps in clothing, or featured bodily shapes through tight clothing. God cares about these magnet impulses of the male eye, and what we do with them." The reader may understand that Alsemero is helpless when it comes to the beauty of Beatrice. Through her body, she is attracting him to her, making him lose everything called reason.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has concluded that Middleton through *The Changeling* (1622) tends to portray complex depictions of characters, particularly women. Most of the characters in the play are driven by passion rather than reason. This kind of passion affects the characters' reasonable judgment and leads them into very deep pit with catastrophic outcomes. The protagonist, Beatrice, becomes like a predator just to reach her goals. She goes against the role model of woman that Kristeva claims. She cannot control her sexual drives and therefore she would cheaply sell her virtue to achieve her desires. She acts out of passions and becomes lost at the end. She and De Flores turn into animalistic persons. They try every awful action just to adapt with the environment as being entities of the nature. The paper has made it clear that the woman, who acts out of reason and preserves her virtue, is seen as a prey or an object, for instance Isabella is the epitome of reason in this paper. Passion leads to false judgments. The characters cannot employ their 'ego' and instead they are employed by their 'id' which, is the storage of sexual desires, controls their fates and leads them to be gone astray.

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